



CONNECTIONS

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How Deep The Well?

by Dan R. Ricks

A young clergy woman, beloved by her congregation, finishing her seventh year as a full-time pastor, successful by almost any and every measure, surrendered her orders and left the church. Her excuse? In a word, burn-out, but in more detail — too many demands from too many people taking too much time

while constantly failing to live up to too many unrealistic expectations. (In other words, a normal pastoral ministry.) I asked what changed over the seven years, and she confessed that nothing in the job changed, but she had. She wanted a life, and ministry had become for her a slow, painful death.

I share this story because this young pastor was part of a study I did on the spiritual life of pastors. One of the main questions we explored was, “how deep is the well from which you draw?” We explored over 200 pastor’s prayer lives, engagement with scripture, worship lives, self-care, and personal relationships to better understand how pastors renew their spirit and stay grounded in Christ. The thesis we tested was this: you can’t give what you don’t have. If the pastor isn’t spiritually nourished and constantly renewed, he or she will not long last in the pastoral vocation. Not surprisingly, the young woman pastor was “too busy” to pray regularly, read the Bible, worship, exercise, rest, or spend time with friends and family. Somehow her ministry displaced her spiritual life.

What follows is a narrative summary of the study, and I will go ahead and spoil the ending: the results aren’t pretty. It is an uphill climb for 4-out-of-5 (80%) of our pastors to maintain any kind of integral spiritual practice in the midst of daily ministry. Pastors do pray, read the Bible, and worship, but generally in service to their leadership, not their personal formation. When pastors eliminate the time allotted to the prayer, scripture study, and worship they perform as part of their job, these three practices all but disappear. Regarding self-care (physical, emotional, and intellectual) and relationships, the picture grows bleaker still.

Prayer – most pastors are professional rather than prolific pray-ers. They

pray at worship, at meetings, at dinners, at fund-raisers, at Bible studies, in hospitals and in homes, with the ill and the bereaved, in prayer groups and before meals. But once they hang up the minister-mantle many keep mum. One hundred percent of our respondents say they pray regularly, but when we ask people to estimate the amount of time they pray apart from church responsibilities, only 54 (27%) say they pray every day, and only 26 (13%) set aside a specific time for prayer and devotions. 101 (50.5%) claim that when work pressures increase, prayer is one of the first things they set aside. 118 (59%) see no reason to add more prayer to a life already full of it — they feel that the praying they do professionally is sufficient. 76 (38%) confess they feel they should pray more often than they do, and 42 (21%) wish they would be more disciplined to do it every day. Two people (1%) pray for more than one hour each day, fourteen (7%) pray thirty minutes each day, and eighteen (9%) pray between 15-30 minutes each day. The most common response was a habit of slipping in a quick 2 minute prayer from time to time on an irregular basis.

Study of Scripture/Devotional Reading — once again, the vast majority of pastoral leaders read and study the Bible for professional reasons — to prepare sermons, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, devotions for meetings, and newsletter/website articles. Over 90% (181) of the respondents lament that they simply do not have time to do the kind of Bible reading/study they would like. As with prayer, most (155, or 77.5%) feel that the time they spend with the Bible in preparation for

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“If the pastor isn’t spiritually nourished and constantly renewed, he or she will not long last in the pastoral vocation.”

Connection 2.0

by Brady Whitton

Yes, it can be difficult for clergy to keep in touch over the miles, and yes, as the demands of our personal and professional lives grow it can be difficult even to make time for lunch or coffee with those nearby. And while there is nothing quite like sitting down face-to-face there *are* alternative ways to connect.



Many UM pastors are connecting through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter - and it’s not nearly as complex as you might think. Facebook is a free social networking website through which users connect with friends and join networks organized by city, workplace, school, etc. to interact with others. There are groups for United Methodist clergy, clergy spouses, LA conference clergy, the LA conference Order of Elders, and more - several churches even have groups. You can share comments, links, videos, pictures, and you can even challenge colleagues to online games such as Scrabble (I will gladly accept all challengers!) Twitter is another free networking site that offers an even quicker and easier way to stay connected. Why not give one of these or some other online “connection tools” a try? If you have questions about these services write me at bwhitton@amiteumc.org and I’d be happy to lend a hand.

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Order of Elders Retreat October 20-21, 2009

You are **INVITED** to be a part of a unique experience as together we explore the question, **"How is it with your soul?"**

We all need time away to rest and recharge. We all need time to connect *and reconnect* with the sisters and brothers with whom we share the call to ordained ministry.

The 2009 Order of Elders retreat will again be an Open Space conference. Open Space is not just a process or technique; it is a different way of thinking, seeing, and being together. There will be no keynote speakers, no pre-announced schedules of workshops, no panel discussions, no organizational booths. Instead, participants are a part of creating their own conference.

"Open Space is based on the belief that we humans are intelligent, creative, adaptive, meaning- and fun-seeking. It sets the context for such creatures to come together knowing they are going to treat each other well. When this happens there is no limit to what can unfold." (Alan Stewart)

PLEASE SEND FULL PAYMENT WITH REGISTRATION

Schedule

Tue., Oct. 20	
10 am	Arrival & Registration
10:30	Opening the Space
12	Lunch
2	Open Space
5	Evening News & Meal
	Evening Off

Wed., Oct. 21	
7:30-8:15	Breakfast
8:45	Open Space
12	Lunch
2	Closing the Space & Communion
5	Adios

Thu., Oct. 22	
OPTIONAL DAY	
7:30-8:15	Breakfast
	read, play golf, recharge, etc.

CHILDCARE is available. For details contact Maria Ardoin at Horseshoe Drive UMC - 318.442.1984

Registration

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

<i>select one</i>	Rate	Due
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Night @ Conf. Cntr. (Sing. Rm.) & Meals	\$89	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Night @ Conf. Cntr. (Dbl. Rm.) & Meals roomate pref:	\$73	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meals Only (I'm staying off campus)	\$42	
	Subtotal	
<input type="checkbox"/> Optional Day (10/22) 1 Night + Brkfast.	\$40	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Registration Fee (All Participants)	\$25	+\$25
	Total	

*Make checks payable to the LA Conference

*If you are NOT staying at the Conference Center you need to make your own housing arrangements

Mail registration and **FULL** payment to:

Wesley UMC
att: Rev. Andy Goff
544 Government St
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

OR register and pay online at
www.la-elders.org

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS SEPTEMBER 30

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preaching and teaching is adequate. Two-thirds (147, or 73.5%) do most of their reading — including the Bible — each week on-line. Only 38 (19%) of pastors say they read a “religious” book in the past twelve months (with the most frequent being “The Purpose Driven Life.”). 49 (24.5%) regularly use commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances, etc., when studying the Bible. Only 32 (16%) claim to do daily devotional reading of scripture. Once again, as congregational demands increase, time with the Bible decreases.

Worship – this, I believe, is an area for concern. 182 (91%) of pastors said the only worship they attend other than what they lead is at conference, district, regional, or national events. 170 (85%) say that they attend fewer than 3 worship experiences a year in which they have no responsibility to provide leadership. 154 (77%) admit that leading worship changes the experience, and makes it difficult to be fully present and to be fully engaged as a participant. Many pastors lament that it is almost impossible to simply relax and worship — too often they find themselves critiquing other services or picking up ideas they can use in their own congregations. Virtually none of the respondents have an intentional, weekly worship experience apart from that which they lead for others.

Self-care: Physical – Yikes. Clergy do not get enough exercise. Thirty (15%) of the participants in the survey exercise every day for at least twenty minutes; seventy-three (36.5%) exercise at least three times a week; but, eighty-seven (43.5%) do not exercise at all! One hundred thirty-eight (69%) of the sample weigh more than is deemed normal/acceptable for their height and age. 94 (47%) report battling chronic health issues, 88 (44%) are on some form of anti-depressant, mood-enhancing prescription drug.

Self-care: Emotional — One hundred forty-two (71%) say they have trouble dealing with stress and display symptoms of depression. Only 59 (28.5%) are engaged in ongoing counseling. A mere 52 (26%) of respondents take one day off per week, without exception. 67 (33.5%) report that they “lose” one-to-three days off per month due to work related demands. 43 (21.5%) have not taken a vacation in at least three years. 13 (6.5%) set aside “mental health/spiritual retreat” days at least once a quarter.

Self-care: Intellectual — Pastors are not big readers. 20 (10%) read 6 books or more each year. 143 (71.5%) read between 3-6 books each year. 30 (15%) read 1-3 books each year. 7 (3.5%) don’t read any books at all. These figures include leisure as well as work related reading. Pastors average thirteen hours per week of television viewing, which is about the same amount of time they spend on-line (14 hours per week/ 2 hours a day). Seven (3.5%) were taking a class of some kind (5 at local seminaries, 1 a dance class, 1 a cooking class). Two-thirds (136, or 68%) faithfully fulfill their annual continuing education commitments, but that is the full extent of their structured learning. Four respondents (2%) were doing on-line/distance learning courses.

Relationships — this is the only category that shows a substantive gender bias: women are three times as likely as men to engage in and protect healthy relationships. One hundred forty-four respondents (72%) confess some feelings of guilt about the sacrifices loved ones have to make due to their ministry. Twenty-eight (14%) claim to have multiple strong relationships where they get together at least once a week with more than one friend or colleague. 79 (39.5%) say they get together with one good friend or colleague on a weekly basis. 60 (30%) say they get together with friends/colleagues at least once each month. The problem comes with the remaining 33 people (16.5%) who say they rarely, if ever, get together with friends or colleagues. There is a very high correlation between this last group and those requiring mood enhancing/anti-depressant medication.

The results are problematic — some glimmers of hope, some signs that things aren’t as bad as feared, some signs that things might be worse than we thought. It certainly challenges our annual conference, board of pensions, and board of ordained ministry leadership to reevaluate continuing education and pastoral support structures.

But another important implication should be identified: seventeen of the 200 respondents decided to leave the ministry in the three-and-a-half years since the study was initially conducted — and all of them share a similar profile:

- no regular prayer life apart from professional responsibilities
- no regular engagement with scripture or devotional reading apart from professional responsibilities
- no worship life apart from professional responsibilities
- poor self-care: physical, emotional and intellectual
- lack of strong, close relationships with friends and colleagues

How deep is the well from which we draw? If we are not being fed on a regular basis, what makes us think we have anything of value with which to nourish others? If we are not drawing from a renewing, sustaining source, why are we so surprised when we “burn-out?” The correlation is strong and, unless we as Christian leaders reorient our priorities, the message is clear. If we do not cultivate a vital prayer life, dedicate ourselves to an intensive study of scripture and spiritual teaching, participate in worship as a fully engaged member of a congregation, commit to regular and intentional self-care — physically, emotionally, and intellectually — and nurture and protect key relationships we will not be the people God needs to lead God’s people.



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2008-2012 Order of Elders' Leadership Team



Bishop William Hutchinson



Brady Whitton, Chair



Doug Cain



Andrew Goff



Juan Huertas



Katie McKay



Donnie Wilkinson

"An order is a covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church." (2004 BOD ¶306)

All ordained elders in the Louisiana Conference are members of the Louisiana Conference Order of Elders, and we consider commissioned clergy to be provisional members.

The chair of the Order of Elders is elected each quadrennium by the Clergy Session.

The 2008-2012 leadership team was selected in conversation with Bishop Hutchinson.